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Chapter I

THE KOL TRIBE OF CENTRAL INDIA

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Distribution and Strength of the Tribe. The Kol tribe, with which this monograph deals, is one of the primitive tribes of Central India. The Central India area, in which they are found, may be described as a triangle with the Nerbudda and the Son rivers for its hypotenuse, having for one of its sides the valley of the Ganges and, for the other, the Chambal river and the Chitor hills. The Kol tribe occupies the north-eastern part of this area. While individual members may be considerably scattered the bulk of the Kols is found in the north of the Central Provinces; in Rewa State, which is included in the Central India Agency; and in the southern portions of the United Provinces adjoining Rewa State. The main centre of distribution for the Kols is Rewa State and the Kols of Central Provinces look back to Rewa as their homeland. The accompanying map of India shows the distribution of the Kols[1]. It will be seen that they belong to the highlands at the northern end of the peninsula. They live among the Vindhya mountains and in the Kaimur hills. These mountains have played an important part in the cultural and ethnological history of India. In early days, before the forests were denuded and the roads cut through, they were an effective barrier to the movements of people. They have been traditionally associated with the southernmost limits of Aryan influence. There is good evidence that they have sheltered some of the oldest races in India since the dawn of history.

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The tribe itself should be carefully distinguished from the Munda tribes of Chota Nagpur which are frequently called Kols in the generic sense. There is no specific Kol tribe in that area, although there is a group called the Larka Kols, or Hos, famous for an insurrection in the year 1832, and a part of the district of Singhbhum is called the Kolhan after them. Mention of the specific Kol tribe is made only in the Census Reports of the Central India Agency and that for the Central Provinces. In the United Provinces the Kols are classed as an exterior caste.

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The Kols stand second in strength among the Munda tribes of the Central Provinces. According to the 1931 Census the Korkus are first with 176,616 and the Kols follow with 91,556. Among all the tribes in the province the Kols stand eighth in numerical strength. In the Central Provinces as a whole the Census Reports give the following figures for the Kol tribe:

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1 Figure 1, p. 2.

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Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1891	87,000	No record	No record
1901	65,043	Do.	Do.
1911	82,598	58,679	23,819
1921	96,593	92,117	4,476
1931	91,556	75,757	15,799
1941	93,944	No record	No record

According to the 1931 Census Report the majority of the Kols found in the Central Provinces is living in the Jubbulpore division, and numbers 57,827, of which only 84 persons returned themselves as adhering to Tribal Religions.

In the Central India Agency the Census Report of the Kol population is as follows. The figures from earlier Census Reports are incomplete:

Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1921	163,000	..	..
1931	200,249	193,526	6,723
1941	32,076	..	..

The Rewa State in the Central India Agency is the home of the Kols according to their own belief. Of the 200,000 Kols in the Central India Agency, the 1931 report showed that 175,391 were found in Rewa State, and of this number only 861 returned themselves as other than Hindu. The report for Central India in 1931 says that there had been a tendency in the past to classify all aboriginal tribes as 'Gonds,' but that this tendency was carefully checked and adjusted in this report.[1]

In the United Provinces bordering Rewa State, Kols are found in considerable numbers. The figures are as follows, and in the Report no distinction is made in regard to tribal religions: all were returned as Hindu and the group treated as an exterior caste:

Year	Total	Year	Total
1891	68,556	1921	68,941
1901	49,653	1931	76,848
1911	65,647	1941	76,737

These are limited practically to three districts: Mirzapur, with some 38,000; Allahabad with 26,000 and Banda with 11,000. The increase over 1921, which amounts to 11.5% is ascribed to immigration from Rewa State. In the United Provinces Report the Kols are treated as an external or depressed class; elsewhere they are uniformly treated as a forest tribe.

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1 *Census of India*, 1931, xxii, p. 217. But the 1941 figures show that a new method of classification was followed. At the time of printing the explanation was not available.

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Turuvasu), consisted of four brothers: Pandya, Kerala, Chola and Kola. These divided the kingdom amongst themselves and the descendants of the last son, Kola, became the ancestors of the present Kols.

There is another legend recorded by Colonel Tickell[1] which tells of two self-existent primeval deities called Ote Boram and Sing Bonga. These deities created a boy and a girl and put them together in a cave expecting them to people the earth. However they were found to be too innocent to give hope of progeny and were therefore instructed by these deities in the art of making rice beer which inflames the passions. This was done, and in the course of time they had twelve sons and twelve daughters. These were divided into pairs in order to form the races to people the world. The choice was made on the basis of the kind of food they chose to eat. Sing Bonga set various kinds of food before them, with results which may be summarized thus:

1st	pair chose	bullock flesh	and became Kols.
2nd	"	buffalo	" Bhumiyas.
3rd	"	vegetables only	" Brahmins.
4th	"	Do.	" Chhatris.
5th & 6th	"	goat	" Sudras.
7th & 8th	"	fish	" Sudras.
9th	"	shell fish	" Bhuiyas.
10th & 11th	"	pork	" Santhals.
12th		nothing	" Ghasis.

As the last pair had nothing the first pair was sorry for them and gave them some of their food and ever since they have been dependent on the Kols for food.

Crooke also records how the Kols of Mirzapur relate that they are emigrants from a place called Kiutali, in the territory of the then Bardi *Raja* in Rewa State. They name one Nanhu as their ancestor and had a tribal temple at Pipri near Chunar on the East Indian Railway, in which they installed Birmha *devi*. "Like many of the kindred tribes, they have legends of a kingdom in the Gangetic valley, whence they were expelled by the Savaras and returned to the hill country of the south."[2]

Russell and Hiralal in *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces* have nothing to add to Crooke's account in connection with traditions of origin. Apparently they did not put much emphasis on this subject.

1 *Ibid.*, p. 296.
2 Crooke, W., *Op. Cit.*, p. 296.

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for this village exogamy is that originally members of one and the same clan (*gotra* or *gotar*) lived together, as the traditions of the Dudh and Dhelki sections definitely testify, and as is still the case in many Hill Kharia settlements."[1] The Kols themselves offer other explanations for this type of exogamy, but the idea of the oneness of the village lies at the back of certain of their reasons. Some said that the children of a village living, as they do, like brothers and sisters makes any thought of such unions repugnant. A similar reason was implied in the response that the boys and girls know each other too well and such a condition would not be conducive to the future marriage relationships. It was also asserted that the presence of parents-in-law was not desirable in the same village, for if the bride was ever beaten by her husband (and it was thought that this was inevitable) her parents might be very angry and a serious quarrel with much trouble between the families was sure to result. Therefore it was considered best to get a girl from another village, and the further the village, the better the chances of avoiding such parent-in-law conflicts. Near Katni they claimed that *they often got their girls* from the Jubbulpore section, and that they sometimes had gone as far as Assam, where Kols have gone to work in the tea gardens.

As remarked earlier, no trace of a clan exogamy could be found among the Kols of to-day, nor an exogamy based on god-septs as among the Gonds,[2] where marriage is not possible between clans with the same number of gods. A family having three gods may marry into another with the same gods or into another with other and a different number of gods.

MARRIAGE LIMITATIONS. There is, however, a clear line limiting the choice of either the bride or the bridegroom. It is based on kinship, for as long as relationship is remembered no marriage should take place. No trace was found of the cross-cousin marriage nor of the ancient Munda custom of marrying a grandfather to a granddaughter.[3] No distinctions are made between cousins. The Kols also possess that which Lowie calls the "incest horror."[4] Children of siblings are brothers and sisters and between them marriage is considered impossible. The levirate, in which the younger brother may be expected to take the wife of a deceased elder brother, is acknowledged. There is, however, no necessity for his doing this, and public opinion does not enforce it; yet in a real sense he is responsible for her welfare and

1 Roy, S. C., *The Kharias*, p. 224.
2 Grigson, W. V., *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, pp. 194, 195, 228.
3 Ghurye, G. S., *Caste and Race in India*, p. 117.
4 Lowie, R. H., *Primitive Society*, pp. 18, 19.